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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: NORTHEAST CHINA LEADERS TO WATCH (PT. 2):
HEILONGJIANG PROVINCE UNDER NEW PARTY SECRETARY JI BINGXUAN

REF: A. (A) SHENYANG 44
[1](#)B. (B) SHENYANG 19

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL STEPHEN B. WICKMAN.
REASONS: 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Northeast China is home to a number of promising, up-and-coming officials worth watching as they seek to prove their political mettle in "revitalizing" this strategic corner of the PRC. Communist Youth League lineages remain a common denominator in most, but not all, profilees. Yesterday's sudden appointment of a national propaganda impresario as Party Secretary of Heilongjiang means that all three of Northeast China's governorships and one of its three party-chief slots are occupied by Youth Leaguers. Working under new Party Secretary Ji Bingxuan are a number of Heilongjiang officials likely bound for more central pastures. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) This is the second in a two-part series on leadership dynamics in northeast China over the past year, with a particular emphasis on rising stars likely bound for higher--possibly national--office. Part one (ref A) focused on Liaoning and Jilin provinces; this focuses on Heilongjiang Province.

HEILONGJIANG: A FEW WORTH TRACKING

[1](#)3. (C) ENTER JI BINGXUAN. Still struggling with cleaning up the major corruption scandals that paralyzed the province only a few years ago, Heilongjiang Province until this week had experienced fairly moderate turnover at its highest levels over the past year. A new governor emerged when ZHANG Zuoji, the 63-year-old former Minister of Labor--whom provincial leaders claimed to us was in poor health, and whom we generally had found quite unimpressive--stepped down, ceding the position to LI Zhanshu. (Zhang, well-regarded by Heilongjiang residents but allegedly scorned by Beijing for his role in publicizing the contamination of the Songhua River in 2005, engineered a bland sunset appointment in Beijing to cap his career.) Party Secretary (PS) QIAN Yunlu, meanwhile, earned himself a vice chairmanship at the national Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) during the recent round of national and provincial reshuffling, but for several months he had appeared unlikely to transfer to Beijing until reaching the mandatory retirement age of 65 in 2009.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Plans changed abruptly on April 7 when Beijing announced that Qian will be imminently replaced by JI Bingxuan, a 56-year-old, up-and-coming heavyweight who since 2403 has served as a propaganda impresario for Hu Jintao as Executive Deputy Director of the Central Committee's Publicity Department. Starting in the early 1980s Ji quickly burnished his credentials during nearly fifteen years in Henan Province in a variety of political

postings, including as Secretary of Henan's Communist Youth League (CYL) and as a municipal PS during the peak of (future Politburo Standing Committee member and national propaganda chief) Li Changchun's career in the province. Following two years in the national CYL Secretariat and a stint in Jilin as provincial propaganda chief, Ji returned to Beijing in 1998, earning major postings over the next ten years in the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and the Central Committee's propaganda arm. Some dubbed Ji "Director No" for his less-than-progressive views on media control, on display most prominently during the Party's 2006 crackdown on "Freezing Point," the China Youth Daily's envelope-pushing magazine supplement. More of the same looks likely under Ji in conservative Heilongjiang, not known for its intrepid journalism.

15. (C) LI ZHANSHU. Following fifteen years at the administrative rank of vice governor, Heilongjiang Deputy Party Secretary Li Zhanshu regained his stride in 2007, replacing Zhang Zuoji as Governor in December. Li has a compelling resume of functional executive experience in three provinces: Hebei, Shaanxi (where he served as Xi'an Party Secretary) and Heilongjiang (where from 2004 onward he worked his way up to Executive Vice Governor). He headed Hebei's Youth League in the 1980s, but his CYL experience is more limited compared to other Youth Leaguers profiled here and in ref A. Li did, however, tell us he once had the unwelcome distinction of leading the very first CYL delegation to the U.S. following Tiananmen.

16. (C) Personally, we have found the generally unpretentious Li to blow hot and cold. In his more relaxed, candid moments, he has queried us about U.S.

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domestic politics and perceptions of China's leaders; he has also conceded that Heilongjiang's development is "too slow" and griped that Beijing is sucking away too much of the province's revenue stream (ref B). Li claimed to us that while in Hebei during the 1990s, he developed a good working relationship with Li Keqiang (then posted to Henan), though the present status of this relationship is unclear. At 58, Li is on the slightly older side compared to someone like Li Keqiang (and incoming PS Ji Bingxuan). With a number of years remaining before retirement, however, and given his multi-provincial experience and potentially useful political ties, we would not discount a modest further rise.

17. (SBU) DU JIAHAO. Replacing Li Zhanshu, one of Heilongjiang's biggest promotions over the past year involved another fast-riser from out of town: DU Jiahao, a 52-year-old Youth Leaguer from East China who in late 2007 catapulted from his post as Party Secretary of Shanghai's Pudong District--a showcase of the city's economic development--to Executive Vice Governor of Heilongjiang. (One explanation for the major promotion is the need to bring in new out-of-province blood to continue reforming Heilongjiang's leadership in the wake of massive corruption scandals that PS Qian Yunlu was brought in from Guizhou to mop up.) Du rose through the ranks of the Shanghai municipal government in the 1980s and 1990s, eventually working his way up to become Secretary General of the Shanghai government in 2003 and finally, in 2004, PS of Pudong. Du will be working with Li Zhanshu to prod along the "revitalization" of the province, which has finally started to pick up momentum in pursuit of front-runner Liaoning Province, even though massive challenges remain. Heilongjiang will be a major adjustment from Shanghai and should prove challenging for Du.

18. (C) LONG XINNAN. Another up-and-comer to watch is LONG Xinnan, who since 2005 has captained Heilongjiang's Organization Bureau, where he has played an influential role in doling out cadre assignments. Turning 54 this

year, Long is a "princeling"; he is the son of LONG Feihu, former deputy chief of the Fuzhou Military Command. Starting in the late 1970s, Long logged over two decades of central-level work in Beijing, eventually rising to head the personnel departments at both the State Development Planning Commission and the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) before moving to Heilongjiang in 2004. Though rumored at one point last year to be headed back to a high-level NDRC position in Beijing, contacts say he appears to be staying put for now. We have found Long impressive and down-to-earth in meetings and expect he will continue his rise in Beijing following this stint in the provinces.

¶9. (SBU) ZHANG XIAOLIAN. At 43, Zhang Xiaolian--a plain-talking Youth Leaguer from Shandong and now Mayor of Harbin--is the youngest of the lot, and according to Harbin officials, the youngest mayor of a Chinese provincial capital. Zhang's deep experience in the Beijing Youth League during the 1990s (during which he claims to have developed a good relationship with Li Keqiang, then head of the national CYL) served him well and quickly propelled him up the ranks of the Beijing municipal government through ¶2005. He then headed to Heilongjiang--part of a cohort of 90 officials sent by the central government to help "revitalize" northeast China--where an assistantship to then-Governor Zhang Zuoji paid off, earning him the Party-chief slot in Mudanjiang od, in very short order, the job of Harbin Mayor in early 2007.

¶10. (C) In private, we have found Zhang, who has studied abroad at Harvard, a polished, impressive figure who seems divorced in mindset from most provincial officials here. Zhang openly laments Heilongjiang's remoteness, claiming he has experienced trouble attracting talented officials to Harbin. He brags that his Youth League background still serves him well when he comes to Beijing, earning him better treatment than that of a typical municipal mayor. One potential weakness may be his candor or, perhaps, ego; during one meal with us, he made subordinates clearly uncomfortable when regaling us with a joke whose butt was former Premier Li Peng. Either way, Zhang looks set to continue his quick rise back in the central government once he wraps up his work in Heilongjiang, perhaps even after a new stint as a vice governor.

WICKMAN